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Emotional Intelligence: Challenging the Perceptions and Efficacy of ‘Soft Skills’ in Policing Incidents of Domestic Abuse Involving Children

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Abstract

It is now widely accepted that living with domestic abuse (DA) can significantly affect children, with the effects of DA continuing to be felt into adulthood. The common conceptualisation of children as passive ‘witnesses’ of DA and the failure to recognise them as direct ‘victims’ in their own right, separate from adult victims, can act as a major barrier for professionals responding to children within this context. The first professionals with whom many child victims of DA come into contact often are members of the police. Yet, little is still known about how children and police officers experience these encounters. The aim of this paper is to conduct a narrative review of the existing literature on the police response to children at DA call outs through the lens of *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman 1996). Reviewed studies state that a large number of police officers reported feelings of overwhelm and uncertainty at incidents of DA involving children. Children reported significant differences in empathy of officers, a key tenet of EI, which impacted their feelings of safety and visibility at incidents of DA. DA incidents are an emotionally challenging aspect of police work and most officers do not appear to have the skills to manage this effectively. The significance of speaking with children in these traumatic situations cannot be understated. EI appears to make an important contribution to the overall efficacy of officers at incidents of DA involving children.

Keywords Children · Domestic abuse · Domestic violence · Intimate partner violence · Family violence · Police officer · Law enforcement officer, emotional intelligence

Globally, reported levels of Domestic Abuse (DA) are on the increase, with one in four women experiencing DA over their lifetime (Council of Europe 2002). This high rate of violence against women has seen DA characterised as a ‘significant public health problem’ (World Health Organisation 2013, p. 2). However, official statistics for DA significantly underestimate its true prevalence due to a tendency for this behaviour to go underreported and/or unrecorded by the police (Mooney 2000). Consequently, DA is the least likely of all violent crimes to be reported to the police, with some research indicating that the police are only made aware of the ‘worst’ cases of DA or

roughly just over one third of all DA incidents (Campbell and Rice 2017; Department of Justice 2017; Office for National Statistics 2017). Obtaining a clear understanding of the prevalence of DA is further complicated by the lack of an international agreed terminology, as the use of different conceptualisations and terminologies are evident within and across different disciplines and diverse cultural settings (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). This is important because how DA is conceptualised and defined determines its prevalence and nature (Itzin 2000).

Researchers have argued that DA is one of the most toxic forms of violence that children can experience, as a result of which home is often a dangerous place for many children (Hughes 2003; Överlien 2010). The physiological connection between DA and negative health outcomes for children is well established in the literature (Felitti et al. 1998; Kitzmann et al. 2003; Wolfe et al. 2003). So compelling is this research that reducing DA has become a key priority for governments, leading to the development of worldwide policies (such as the Istanbul Convention (2011) adopted by the Council of Europe) to prevent DA and mitigate its effects. Moreover,

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reforms have been undertaken to enhance the police response to DA, through ensuring perpetrators are arrested and held to account, and that the response to victims is improved (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary 2014). Research consistently highlights that children, especially young children, are frequently present at and directly involved in DA incidents (Clarke and Wydall 2015; Fantuzzo and Fusco 2007; Radford et al. 2011). In the UK, prevalence studies by Radford et al. (2011) found that 12% of children aged 11 and under, 17.5% of 11–17-year-olds and 23.7% of 18–24-year-olds have been exposed to DA. In addition, worldwide one in four children (176 million) under the age of five are believed to be living with DA (UNICEF 2017). Police officers are often the first professionals that may become aware of the DA that children are experiencing and their presence may represent a 'key moment' within which to enhance their safety and welfare (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 221). Yet, little is known about how children experience police responses to DA or how police response to children may aggravate or lessen the negative consequences of DA.

Policing Domestic Abuse

There is some evidence to say that police intervention in DA may not always be a positive experience for children and in some instances can place children at even greater risk (Buckley et al. 2007; McGee 2000; Mullender et al. 2002; Överlien and Aas 2016; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). Unless they have been physically injured or are witnesses to DA, children can be perceived as outside the abuse by police officers and therefore the responsibility of other professionals, such as social workers (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). With some exceptions, most of the harm suffered by children is emotional and/or psychological in nature and concerns have been raised about the inadequate training police officers receive to equip them with the skills necessary to deal effectively with the needs of victims of DA (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) 2014, 2015a; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). Foremost for victims is the need to be believed, listened to and not judged (HMIC 2014). However, concerns have been raised about the extent to which police officers are providing emotional support to victims when they respond to DA incidents (HMIC 2014; 2015a; b). In particular, concerns have been expressed about the need for training that targets 'developing communication skills, including a specific focus on empathy with victims' (HMIC 2014, p. 23, emphasis added by author).

Concern about improving the police response to DA victims has focused on less on laws and policies than it has about the human element, such as the attitudes of attending officers (HMIC 2014). A positive and effective police response involves not only professional skills but the ability to display

empathy with victims and the self-awareness to recognise and manage the intense and challenging emotions that officers often report experiencing in response to attending incidents of DA (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012; Smith 1989). Historically, officer training has focused primarily on managing the criminal justice and legislative aspects of DA, which may be a factor in reflecting officers' attitudes to DA and to their conceptualisation of their policing role which has 'skewed attention to process over the quality and effectiveness of help given' (Munro 2011, p. 6). Significantly less attention is given to developing 'soft skills' such as Emotional Intelligence (EI), to deal with the complexity of DA to ensure there is a focus on victim care and safety and to handle the 'emotional labour' involved in responding to these incidents (Hochschild 1983). For police officers, responding to DA incidents is perceived as being different from other forms of 'traditional' police work, with officers reporting a dislike of attending DA-related calls due to the potential for these events to trigger intense emotional reactions, compounded by their lack of training in how to recognise and manage these emotions (Överlien and Aas 2016).

Police officers need to have the necessary professional skills and 'soft skills' such as EI, in order to discharge their professional responsibilities effectively. EI has been defined as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions effectively in ourselves and others." (Goleman and Boyatzis (HayGroup 2011, p. 4)). Policing requires officers to adopt many different roles and attitudes in the course of discharging their duty. These include listening and providing empathy, qualities often associated with the role of counsellor or social worker, as well as conveying authority and enforcing the law. The role of the police is rapidly changing both locally and nationally, reflecting a move away from 'traditional' law enforcement and increasingly towards provision of support, in a criminal justice system that is seeking to become more victim oriented (Hales and Higgins 2016). This transformation requires officers to adopt a different approach to service delivery, one which demands a high level of competency in relation to specific skills such as empathy, which is a key aspect of the psychological concept of EI (Goleman 1996).

Boyatzis and Goleman's model of EI (HayGroup 2011) consists of four key constructs: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (empathy) and relationship management; together contain a subset of 12 *emotional competencies*, which underpins the author's conceptualisation of EI (Table 1): 'An emotional competence is a learned capacity based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work' (Goleman 1999, p. 24). EI determines the potential for learning the practical skills that are based on its four constructs: 'Simply being high in emotional intelligence does not guarantee a person will have learned the emotional competencies that matter for work; it means only that

Table 1 EI constructs and emotional competencies

Construct & emotional competencies	Capsule description
Self-awareness	Recognising and understanding our own emotions; captured in the competency:
Emotional self-awareness	The ability to understand our own emotions and their effects on our performance
Self-management	Effectively managing our own emotions; captured in the competencies:
Emotional self-control	The ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses in check and maintain our effectiveness under stressful or hostile conditions
Achievement orientation	Striving to meet or exceed a standard or excellence; looking for ways to do things better; setting challenging goals and taking calculated risks
Positive outlook	The ability to see the positive in people, situations and events; persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks
Adaptability	Flexibility in handling change; juggling multiple demands and adapting our ideas and approaches
Social awareness	Recognising and understanding the emotions of others; captured in the competencies:
Empathy	The ability to sense others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns and picking up cues to what is being felt and thought
Organizational awareness	The ability to read a group's emotional currents and power relationships, identifying influencers, networks and dynamics
Relationship management	Applying our emotional understanding in our dealings with others; captured in the competencies:
Influence	The ability to have a positive impact on others, persuading or convincing others in order to gain their support
Coach and mentor	The ability to foster the long-term learning or development of others by giving feedback and support
Conflict management	The ability to help others through emotional or tense situations, tactfully bringing disagreements into the open and finding solutions all can endorse
Inspirational leadership	The ability to inspire and guide individuals and groups to get the job done, and to bring out the best in others
Teamwork & collaboration	The ability to work with others toward shared goals, participating actively, sharing responsibility and rewards, and contributing to the capability of the team

they have excellent potential to learn them' (Goleman 1999, p. 25). Importantly, by treating EI as a 'learned capacity', we can treat it as an area that can be developed or improved through training or personal development and not some innate quality captured by the motto 'you have either got it or you don't'. Each construct, whilst distinct, remains related to the others: 'Emotional competencies cluster into groups, each based on a common underlying emotional intelligence capacity' (Goleman 1999, p. 25). For example, the most visible and discussed element of the EI model, *empathy* (social awareness) the ability to sense others' feelings and perspectives, is built upon an individual's ability to perceive and understand their own emotions (*self-awareness*): 'Empathy builds on self-awareness; the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings' (Goleman 1996, p. 96). Goleman goes further, stating the construct *self-awareness* lies at the heart of the EI model and, to a great extent, influences the ability to develop the other competencies. Goleman's model demonstrates the relationship between constructs is one based on *independence*, *interdependence* and *hierarchical*. Training which aims to promote and/or improve

empathy in officers within the context of DA (HMIC 2014, p. 23) must therefore look beyond a narrow view of this concept and seek to increase self-awareness and understanding of emotion in the first instance: 'If they have little self-awareness, they will be oblivious to their own weaknesses and lack the self-confidence that comes from certainty about their strengths' (Goleman 1999, p. 25).

Goleman and colleagues identified and defined four areas of competency which underpin their conceptualisation of EI. Goleman's behavioural measurement of EI identified and defined several skills within each of the constructs that one might target to develop/improve EI. *Self-Awareness* is the ability to recognise the signals that tell you what you are feeling and use them as an ongoing guide as to how you are feeling. It is being able to recognise how you respond to cues in the environment and how your emotions affect your language and behaviour. It is also about knowing your inner resources, strengths and limits. A strong case has been made for the importance of self-awareness and its relationship to the other competencies (Havers 2010). It is apparent how this ability would be critically important for the role of police

Table 2 Database and key journals searched

Databases	Journals
International bibliography of the social sciences (IBSS)	Child abuse and neglect
PsychINFO	Child abuse review
Scopus	Journal of family violence
Social care online (SCIE)	Journal of gender-based violence
Social policy and practice	Journal of interpersonal violence
	Police practice and research: an international journal
	Policing & society
	Psychology of violence
	Trauma, violence and abuse
	Violence against women

officers within the context of this study. *Self-Management* draws on each of the competencies within this construct as well as self-awareness. It includes being able to manage difficult situations and people more effectively, firstly by anticipating situations that may cause you to react and changing how you respond to them. Individuals with this skill also often seek alternative explanations/perspectives in challenging situations, which may be different from their own. Shifting focus away from personalisation is a key component of self-management. This in turn, helps to maintain a positive outlook and adapt to the unexpected and handle change more effectively when new information is available or needs change: 'Self-control is crucial for those in law enforcement. [...] Competence studies in law enforcement organisations find outstanding officers use the least force necessary, approach volatile people calmly and with a professional demeanor and are adept at de-escalation' (Goleman 1999, pp. 87/88). *Social Awareness* and *Relationship Management* is where emotional intelligence becomes most visible to others and impacts our relationships with others. This competency is about understanding others (empathy) and the ability to hear and understand others' thoughts, feelings and concerns, even when partly expressed or unspoken. As highlighted earlier, empathy has been identified as a crucial factor in the development of the police response to DA (HMIC 2014; 2015b). Research demonstrates that social awareness is based on the competencies self-awareness and self-management. Goleman and colleagues found that individuals who demonstrate self-awareness were more likely to show strength in 10 out of a total of 12 ESCI competencies. People with this skill pick up on emotional cues. They are able to understand not only what people are saying but *why* they are saying it. Individuals with this skill ask questions to understand what others are *really* thinking, feeling or needing rather than making assumptions based on their own thoughts and feelings. It is apparent why this ability is at the heart of the police response to DA incidents involving children – in a majority of cases the impact of DA is emotional/psychological which is not always visible. Furthermore, children are often too frightened to verbalise

how they are feeling as this may put them at further risk (Överlien and Aas 2016). Emotional self-awareness, self-management and social awareness enables the ability to create and maintain positive relationships with others and address issues such as DA at an interpersonal level. Any approach to develop EI must start with a careful assessment of the capacity for self-awareness and self-management as clearly argued by Goleman and colleagues.

Limited attention has been paid to the role of emotions and how they operate adaptively or maladaptively within the context of DA and the police response. A number of studies and inquiries have raised concerns about the emotional disconnect between professionals responding to incidents of abuse and DA and the children involved (Munro 2011). Fears have been expressed that children are often being ignored or becoming 'invisible' to professional attention, with one of the key learning points emerging from a review of practice being that professionals such as the police need to see and speak to children (Devaney et al. 2013). Yet, few studies have examined the police response to child victims in the context of DA. Most of the research literature exploring the police response focuses on the perceptions of adult victims (Horwitz et al. 2011; Logan et al. 2006; Robinson and Stroshine 2005; Stalans and Finn 2006; Stephens and Sinden 2000). The main aim of this research is to examine the police response to child victims of DA so as to offer suggestions for how the police response to DA can be improved for children. Drawing on the theoretical framework of EI, this study will conduct a narrative review of the literature relating to children's perceptions of police officers responding to DA incidents to better understand how differences in police practice and performance may occur. It will make an original contribution to work in this area by investigating whether the theoretical framework of EI can usefully be applied to police-child interactions at DA incidents to offer suggestions for how the ability of these officers to respond in an empathic way to children can be enhanced. This paper will address this gap in knowledge by conducting a narrative review of the published academic literature to answer the following research question(s):

1. How do children living with DA experience police response into DA incidents through the lens of the theoretical framework, EI.
2. How does the presence or absence of EI skills in officer's impact how police officers experience, understand and respond to children at DA incidents where children are present.

Methodology

Research Design

A narrative literature review was conducted to explore children's experience of police officers response to DA incidents, using the psychological lens, of EI as the analytic framework. Narrative reviews are defined as a synthesis of the extant knowledge on a topic from a theoretical or contextual standpoint. The review is a critical analysis and commentary on the identified and included literature, and while it is not as definitive as a systematic review, is considered useful in the exploratory stages of scoping an issue, especially when the literature available is likely to be sparse and diverse (Popay et al. 2006).

Search and Selection of Studies for Review

In order to identify research literature examining how the police understand and respond to children living with DA, as well as children's experiences of the police response to DA, a broad search of the literature was undertaken. This included a search of relevant electronic databases, hand searching of relevant journals, citation searches for primary studies and prior reviews, a search of open grey literature, review of theses and dissertations (ProQuest Dissertations & Theses: UK & Ireland; EThOS and DART-Europe E-Thesis Portal) and internet searching (via Google Scholar). Five key social science and multidisciplinary databases were searched, as well as ten key journals relating to this area of study (see Table 2).

A word search for each of the key concepts related to this study was developed in order to formulate a comprehensive search statement and thereby increase the precision of the review process (Kugley et al. 2011). Initially, the key search terms "domestic violence" AND police AND child* were entered into the searches. Relevant texts were identified and key terms for each concept were recorded. The relevance of each key search term was tested by joining each of the terms one at a time within each concept with the Boolean operator "OR" (e.g. "domestic violence" OR "domestic abuse" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "family violence"). The complete search statement included the search terms combined below and was limited to a text search of title, abstract or subject terms to ensure comprehensiveness. Key word

searches were also conducted within databases where advanced search options were not available.

Search 1

"domestic violence" OR "domestic abuse" OR "intimate partner violence" OR "family violence".
AND child* OR (child* and youth).
AND polic* OR "law enforcement".

Once relevant abstracts/papers were identified, each was assessed for its relevance to the objectives of the research and if appropriate, selected for inclusion in the review. A study was included if it concerned children under the age of 18 with experience of police involvement in the context of DA or police experiences of children in the context of DA, or if it involved direct assessment of children in the context of DA. Although there were few studies in this area, this study was focused on research that involved a qualitative element (e.g. qualitative research or mixed-methods) given the focus on children's voices and lived experience of DA. A study was excluded if it did not involve children under the age of 18, did not involve DA, did not include a qualitative element or was not written in the English language. No date restrictions were placed on these searches.

Using the search terms described above, the initial literature search produced 4872 articles. Article titles were screened for relevance, with the most relevant articles retained for abstract review. This process reduced the number of articles to 65. The references in these articles were transferred to a web-based reference management software system (RefWorks) through which duplicates were removed. A further 53 articles were excluded on the basis of irrelevance following a second round of observations. The full text of each of the remaining 12 studies was obtained and assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study. Based on this assessment, a further seven articles were deemed not to meet the inclusion criteria and were excluded from the study. This resulted in a final sample of five articles that met the inclusion criteria for the final review (see Fig. 1).

The details of the five articles included in the final review are summarised in Table 3. Of the five studies, two are key studies as they focused solely on the police response, while the three remaining studies examined children's experiences of a range of agency responses (including the police) within the context of DA.

Data Analysis

The EI framework and the 12 emotional competencies (Table 1) formed the basis of the analysis of the five studies included in the narrative review (Table 3). As this was a

scoping study, analysis sought to explore, using a qualitative approach, police officers' responses that were illustrative/evidence of EI and associated constructs (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management); defined under the capsule descriptions. Each capsule descriptor was labelled and given a code e.g. emotional self-awareness – SA1, Table 1, these codes were then applied to the studies included in the review. In this way the author was able to confirm or refute the theoretical model and its associated constructs and competencies. Given the nature of this study and small sample size, a qualitative approach was appropriate to elucidate a deeper, more meaningful analysis of EI, to help connect what is traditionally measured quantitatively in the 'social and cultural contexts within which emotions are experienced' (Corcoran and Tormey 2012, p. 219). Findings are presented using a narrative synthesis, given the small sample size and its qualitative nature.

Children's Experiences of Policing Domestic Abuse

This section summarises the five studies included in the literature review and their key findings. Three of the five studies were carried out in the UK, while one was conducted in the Republic of Ireland and one in Norway. The majority of child participants were aged between 8 and 20 years old. As previously stated, three studies investigated children's experiences of a range of agency responses to DA, while two focused solely on the police response (Överlien and Aas 2016; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). The EI constructs of emotional self-awareness, self-management and social awareness and a number of EI competencies were most evident from the findings which greatly impacted children's sense of visibility and safety, which is discussed under the following headings of self-awareness and self-management and social awareness and relationship management.

Self-Awareness and Self-Management

All of the aforementioned studies outline traumatic incidents and provide evidence of the significant suffering that children experience within the context of DA. Some children describe incidents in which they felt their lives, or the life of their mother and siblings were at risk (Buckley et al. 2007; Överlien and Aas 2016). Overall, the children involved in these studies in Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom reported negative experiences with the police and expressed a great deal of 'uncertainty and concern' about what they expected from the police (Överlien and Aas 2016, p. 437). Across all studies, the majority of children reported that the attending officers did not speak with them. The primary focus of attention and communication for the majority of police

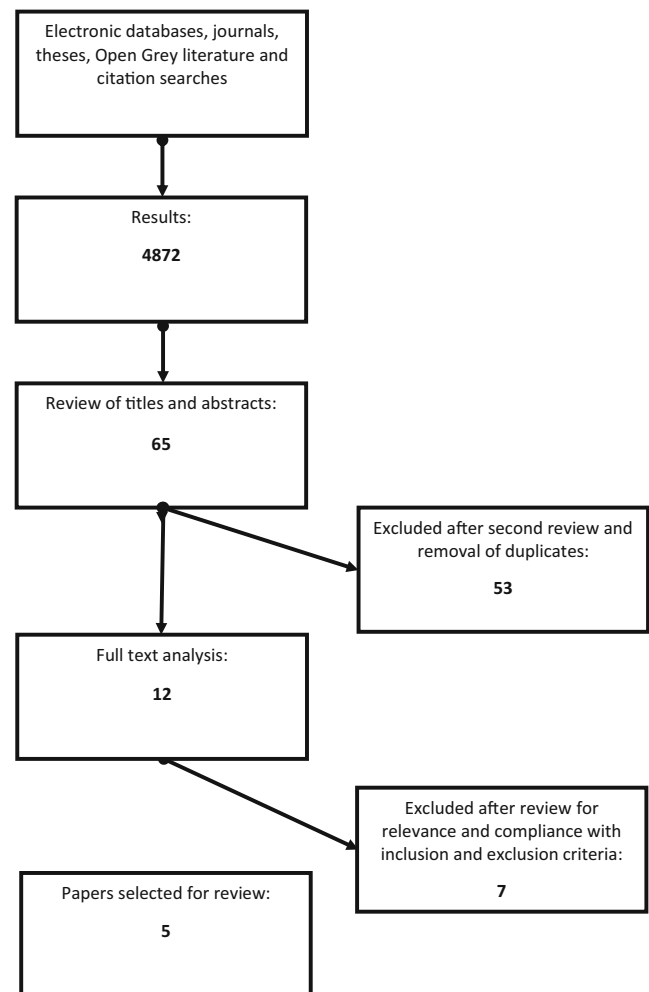


Fig. 1 Flowchart outlining the literature review searches

officers remains on the adults involved. Evidence presented here suggests that non-physical forms of DA such as emotional and psychological harm are not taken as seriously or acknowledged by officers in the same way as physical violence and injury, which proved to be a key factor impacting the police response to children; importantly, perceiving them as victims in their own right. For many children, emotional and psychological harm can become obscured behind a response which may indicate that they are unharmed and unaffected by the abuse in the home.

DA is a situation that presents significant challenges for officers, both emotionally and professionally. DA draws on the cornerstone of EI, self-awareness, as well as self-management competencies, emotional self-control and adaptability in order to respond to the needs of children present at these incidents. Findings reported by Överlien and Aas (2016) in their study in Norway in which they conducted in-depth interviews with 24 police officers and 25 children and adolescents about their experiences of DA, and the study conducted by Richardson-Foster and colleagues in the U.K, revealed a number of reasons why officers failed to speak directly with

Table 3 Studies Included in the final review

Country/Date	Authors	Title	Sample Size	Design/Methods
1* Norway, 2016	Överlien, C. & Aas, G.	Police patrols and children experiencing domestic violence	Police officers ($n = 24$); children 8–20 years old ($n = 25$)	Qualitative/Interviews
2* UK, 2012	Richardson-Foster et al.	Police intervention in domestic violence incidents involving children	Police officers ($n = 33$); children 10–19 years old ($n = 19$)	Mixed Methods Quantitative/Interviews
3 Republic of Ireland, 2007	Buckley et al.	Listen to Me! Children's experiences of domestic violence	Children 8–17 years old ($n = 22$)	Qualitative Interviews
4 UK, 2002	Mullender et al.	Children's perspectives on domestic violence	Children 8–13 years old (Phase 1: $n = 1395$; Phase 2: $n = 54$)	Mixed Methods Questionnaire/Interviews
5 UK, 2000	McGee, C.	Childhood experiences of domestic violence	Children 5–17 years old ($n = 54$)	Qualitative Interviews

*Key study: Focused primarily on the police response

children. These included the perception of children as ‘witnesses’ to, rather than victims of, DA, the view that this was ‘not their role’ and fear of opening ‘Pandora’s Box’. Importantly, these issues highlight the absence of or low *emotional self-awareness* and *self-management* skills impact officers’ ability to offer immediate assistance to children who are in need of help and protection. Findings from interviews with officers revealed that what was considered ‘witnessing’ violence in the home depended on the attending officer’s understanding of DA and the impact on children and therefore varied significantly. Generally, this understanding reflected a narrow definition focused on directly witnessing or being directly involved or *physically* harmed in the violence. The majority of officers felt it was ‘not their role’ and therefore unnecessary to talk to children at incidents unless they had been witnesses or they had been physically harmed (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 229); as they saw it, their ‘role’ focused on enforcing the law and emotional support provision, which was seen as the role of Social Services. The evidence suggests that adults, including police officers, often hold the belief that children who have experienced DA are unaffected and/or are unaware of the abuse in the home (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). While officers are aware of their responsibility to undertake safeguarding activity, including talking to children if they are present at a domestic incident or checking on them if officers are told children are sleeping upstairs, this is not happening on a consistent basis (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). These findings suggest the absence of or low emotional self-awareness, which Goleman argues is critical for the development of empathy and empathetic concern for others:

When you communicate with the family you communicate with the adults generally speaking and you don’t communicate with the children, the only time that you communicate with the children generally is when they are suspects [...] or they’re witnesses. (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 231)

Describing children as witnesses created a great deal of tension and uncertainty around officers speaking with them within this context (Överlien and Aas 2016; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). This reluctance was often underpinned by officers’ lack of training in ‘achieving best evidence’ (ABE) interview techniques. In Norway, officers who talked to children about criminal activity came under heavy criticism from professional experts on judicial examination (Överlien and Aas 2016). The perception of children as ‘witnesses’ created and supported a number of beliefs; most importantly, it negated children as ‘victims’, creating a barrier to meeting children’s emotional needs. From this perspective, there is a greater likelihood of children not receiving contact with officers during this critical period. These findings may also reveal how officers view their role as orientated primarily towards a traditional criminal justice approach and the enforcement of the law and not towards help and support which has important implications for children. Significantly, the responses that proved most helpful to children were more informal help and support and communication and would not conflict with any criminal investigation.

Findings revealed officers were often concerned about the potential additional emotional burden they may place on children by talking about the abuse in the home. There is evidence that professionals such as police officers often feel ‘overwhelmed’ in these situations, as their reports rarely contain descriptions of children’s emotional states. A key skill, as highlighted by Goleman, is the ability for officers to manage difficult and intense emotions (*emotional self-control and adaptability*) that may arise at DA incidents involving children in order to respond and adapt to these situations appropriately and sensitively: ‘Adaptability requires the flexibility to take into account multiple perspectives on a given situation. This flexibility depends [...] on an emotional strength: the ability to [...] remain calm in the face of the unexpected’ (Goleman 1999, p. 99). Among police officers there was a fear of ‘opening a Pandora’s box of overwhelming need in

children' if they spoke to them about DA (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 230). Almost half of officers in this study expressed feelings of unease about talking to children at the scene of DA. Goleman (1999, p. 143) describes this as 'empathy avoidance' - while this may be a strategic and intentional response by officers who either wish to avoid engaging with children either to save time or to protect themselves from emotional distress, officers who adopt this approach fail to respond to or make direct contact with children. Importantly, this acted as a barrier to exploration of children's needs, a feeling exemplified by the following observation by a female officer where she had attended emergency call outs where none of her colleagues had talked with the children present, expressing great dissatisfaction:

What strikes me is that we often seem so damn scared to talk to children (Överlien and Aas 2016, p. 443)

The studies by Richardson-Foster et al. (2012) and Överlien and Aas (2016) found that a much smaller number of police officers displayed much greater levels of understanding and empathy toward children; speaking with children directly and provided emotional support (being listened to and concerns taken seriously). These officers described children as 'victim[s]' independent from adult victims, which appeared to influence how they interacted and communicated with children at DA incidents. These officers had a much broader understanding of how children experience DA to encompass emotional and psychological harm as well as acknowledging that children have equal rights to adults involved, respecting the child's right to be given information. During Överlien and Aas's (2016) investigation, for example, several specialist police officers recognised the benefits of police response officers conducting initial conversations with children during this acute stage for any subsequent investigation or support, sharing the responsibility of helping children with agencies such as Social Services. The testimony of children is an important basis for officer's immediate decisions: whether it is justifiable to allow the child to remain at home, for example, or whether the child needs to be moved into the custody of other caregivers immediately. In addition, the officer used conversations with children as a basis for deciding whether it is necessary to call in welfare or health care services:

I think the victim has a right to be heard – then I think it would be dereliction of duty not to talk to the child. (Överlien and Aas 2016, p. 441)

Kids are our witness and our victims. It is important to explain everything to the children, they have a right to know what is happening. (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 229)

Notably, these officers also described the presence of children at DA incidents can evoke strong emotions. However their professional responsibility of speaking with children at the scene was viewed as paramount, signalling to children that DA is wrong and their concerns will be taken seriously:

I think that we must have the courage to talk to children about what has happened – because if we do not – the child can almost perceive it as taboo – it is possible that there has been a dramatic event for the children – and then the police come – who is supposed to stand for right – and so we do not take up what has happened – I think that...the police know, but will not talk about it with me – it could be weird. (Överlien and Aas 2016, p. 442).

These officers appeared to be more skilled at speaking with children and meeting their emotional needs within this context. These findings demonstrate the importance of EI based competencies emotional self-awareness, self-control and adaptability – providing officers with the skills and 'courage' to manage the difficult and intense emotions they may experience in their encounters with children as well as an awareness of their responsibilities regarding any future criminal investigations (Överlien and Aas 2016).

Police attitudes were a key theme to emerge from research conducted with children exploring the police response. How police officers responded to children and the sensitivity they showed to children (empathy) in their interactions with them could increase or decrease their feelings of safety and wellbeing. Children often talked about how the police response lacked empathy, how their concerns were not taken seriously and how they were ignored and excluded from participation (Buckley et al. 2007; McGee 2000; Mullender et al. 2002; Överlien and Aas 2016; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). Unless they have been physically injured or are direct witnesses to the abuse, children are too often perceived as outside the abuse and therefore the responsibility of other professionals, such as social workers. With some exceptions, most of the harm suffered by children is emotional and/or psychological in nature; few officers seem to have the training or the skills necessary to recognise and to deal with this effectively, and thereby fail to uphold their professional duty and responsibilities with regard to children (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). These factors may be key in shaping children's perceptions (e.g. of policing as a 'helping' profession) and their experience of police in the context of DA. Moreover, in the longer term, negative police attitudes, may perpetuate erroneous attitudes toward the self and the abuse enacted in the home, preventing children from talking about the abuse or seeking help from the police or other service professionals in the future. For example, research with children reveals they often blame themselves for the abuse in the home and feelings

of shame and stigma believing it is something that only happens to them can leave children feeling alone and isolated; ‘Endeavouring to make sense of complicated and frightening realities is obviously much more difficult in the absence of information’ (Mullender et al. 2002, p. 96).

Social Awareness and Relationship Management

Children often reported that the police did not take their concerns seriously; they felt invisible to police attention and sometimes reported feeling at greater risk as a direct result of police action (Buckley et al. 2007; McGee 2000; Mullender et al. 2002; Överlien and Aas 2016). These studies demonstrate that children see the police as people who can help them in situations of DA and are ‘key moments’ (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 221) to improve the lives of children living with DA. However, the findings demonstrate a lack of social awareness and empathy on the part of officers, a key tenet of EI, supported in the findings reported here with officers. One young woman, for example, ran a mile and a half to the Garda’s (police officer in Ireland) house in her bare feet, convinced her father was going to kill her mother, only for her concerns to be later dismissed, resulting in a failure to investigate the situation or take it seriously (Buckley et al. 2007). Another young person also from this study, reported a similar experience with the police:

[T]he cops could have been a bit more helpful with us. Because they were called out at least five or six times and every time nothing happened. They came and they went...They did nothing about it, and we never saw them again, no call backs or anything.’ (Ibid, p. 42).

Another young woman called the police, who arrived at the home and informed the perpetrator that the child had called them, placing her in grave danger (McGee 2000). Such findings demonstrate a significant lack of empathy and concern by officers with regard children’s experience and the significant emotional and psychological harm caused by DA:

[They came to the house] many, many times. [...] They took Mom and brought her to a cell to sleep it off, and I slept without my mother. She was gone. [...] I slept in my room, my stepfather was at home, sleeping. They came, got Mom, and left. (Överlien and Aas 2016, p. 438)

Usually I wouldn’t phone the police because I know that makes it worse. The police just come to the door and then they go and leave him in the house, which means that my mum’s getting in trouble, I’m going to get in trouble. (McGee 2000, p. 141)

These experiences do little to challenge the negative stereotypes of the police that children may hold, often making things worse for children rather than better. Children’s perceptions of the police often focus on the more punitive role (Powell et al. 2008); a police response which is helpful and empathetic may be useful in helping children to see beyond stereotyped perceptions and discern a more personal, *human face* of police officers. A leading study by Richardson-Foster et al. (2012) employed a mixed-method approach to explore the police response to children. Their findings were based on quantitative file data from police reports of DA across two sites in northern and southern England, supplemented with 33 in-depth qualitative interviews with officers. The file data consisted of 251 incidents of DA during January 2007, involving 460 children or young people under the age of 18. Twenty-nine percent of children were under the age of two and 44% were under the age of five. Almost half (45%) of the children in this study witnessed the incident, and in 53% of cases, the abuse was rated as medium/high. Children were directly involved in a number of incidents, in which they were described as being physically and verbally abused, threatened, intimidated and dragged (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). Police reports were frequently inconsistent in terms of children’s exact whereabouts during incidents (for 26% of the children in the sample, the location of the child was not clear or omitted), but generally children were recorded as ‘present’ with no additional comments. Officers rarely documented the emotional state of these children, despite the extent and gravity of their involvement highlighting the need for officers to develop the skills within Goleman’s model (self-awareness and social awareness) to recognise and understand the emotions of others. In one incident, for example, an 11 year old girl had witnessed the physical and verbal abuse of her mother and she also had been dragged downstairs during the incident (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012).

One boy who had been the primary victim described the police as being ‘nice’ to him and having asked him what he needed at that time, which was to be taken to a safe place with his mother (Överlien and Aas 2016, p. 439). These studies demonstrate the importance of officers speaking with children directly to ask them what would be helpful, and the importance of this should not be understated:

She was really helpful, she spoke to me rather than just my mum, she was the one that gave us the number for the NSPCC. She was just good at listening to us and that. (Richardson-Foster et al. 2012, p. 227)

Interviews with children also found that arresting/removing the perpetrator is only part of an overall response that restores children’s sense of safety (Buckley et al. 2007; McGee 2000; Mullender et al. 2002; Överlien and Aas 2016; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012). The findings from these studies suggest

that police-child interactions serve important functions other than simply to generate a ‘record for the system’ for future action by other agencies such as Social Services. Importantly, children wish to be treated as victims of DA and with respect for their independence and agency under the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989; Article 12 and Article 13). Recalling those officers who had demonstrated empathy, talked to and listened to them, children emphasised the importance of being *seen* and given the opportunity to tell their stories. This made children feel safe, and more importantly, visible. It ensures children are being given the message from key professionals such as the police that their experiences are important and will be taken seriously and recognises their full personhood. The significance of this cannot be overstated.

As the findings from these studies show, contact with police is emotionally laden and emotionally important for children. The evidence presented here suggests the competencies developed within Goleman and Boyatzis model of EI (Table 1) such as emotional self-awareness, self-management and empathy, help to understand differences between officers conceptualisations of children (witness and victim) and their capacity to meet children’s need for support and someone to talk to and respecting them as individuals in their own right alongside fulfilling professional duties and obligations within this context. A lack of training which focuses on both professional skills and personal qualities such as EI, may be hindering the development of policing DA and importantly for this study, a focus on children – providing support for this study.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings from the available research on children and the police response (Buckley et al. 2007; McGee 2000; Mullender et al. 2002; Överlien and Aas 2016; Richardson-Foster et al. 2012) reveal a clear and consistent message. There is a significant and troubling gap between what children say is helpful (i.e. being acknowledged and listened to, validated and believed) and what they currently report receiving from the policing response. Evidence from studies reveals limited direct contact and communication between police officers and children when police are called to respond to incidents of DA. Police attitudes towards children vary in important ways which are likely to shape their experience, understanding and response to children, and especially their ability to convey empathy. Richardson-Foster et al. (2012) cite the lack of skills, training and confidence as principal factors in the disparity in police attitudes towards children. Whilst valid, these explanations may not adequately account for that disparity. We now need to go to the next level, by trying to understand ‘why’ the police response has not been as effective as it could be. It is not

easy for officers to remain neutral in such an emotionally and professionally challenging context. These findings, and the evidence from neuroscience pertaining to the interconnectedness of emotion and cognition (Dolan 2002) may also reflect differences in the psychosocial profile of individual police officers: ‘Emotion is central to the quality and range of everyday human experience’ (p. 1191). A positive police response may be due not only to a high level of job-related skills but to an ability to recognise and regulate their own emotional engagement with others.

Little attention has been paid to the psychosocial correlates of police attitudes. This is, perhaps, concerning given the nature of policing – which is experiencing a transformation (Hales and Higgins 2016). This current paper is an attempt to construct a psychological understanding of the police response to incidents of DA involving children. The research reported in this paper highlights the importance for further investigation into factors such as ‘Emotional Intelligence’ (Goleman 1996) that help police to manage the ‘emotional labour’ associated with DA involving children and to improve the ways in which they relate to children; suggesting new opportunities for knowledge development in this field. Officers who display high levels of EI, recognise their own emotions and the importance of managing emotions to adapt their professional response in important ways that helped children feel seen and cared for – demonstrating empathy. This must be viewed as an important objective for policing DA. Goleman and Boyatzis model of EI offers a framework from which to understand how individual differences in empathy develop and offers a framework to improve/develop these skills with officers.

Conclusion

Emotional Intelligence and Policing - Developing a New Perspective

In a profession that remains highly gendered, attitudes concerning emotion and what are commonly referred to as ‘soft skills’ do present some challenges; as attitudes to emotions and ‘soft skills’ may be viewed as ancillary to the role of policing. Based on the findings here, EI may offer a valuable opportunity to improve outcomes for children living with DA and in this new political and social landscape making increasing demands on policing resources, accountability processes and legitimacy. Understanding and responding to the needs of others involves some of the most difficult work of all which becomes clearly evident within the context of DA, especially when children are involved. The ability to show empathy to another, requires exposing ourselves to that suffering. Despite claims that ‘empathy comes naturally’, it takes certain qualities and arduous mental effort to get into another person’s

mind and then respond with compassion rather than judgement. The competencies within Goleman and Boyatzis model of EI helps individuals recognise their strengths and weaknesses, and situations such as DA that may trigger intense emotions, as demonstrated in the studies reviewed in this paper. As Cooper and Lousada (2005, p. 167) have noted, ‘emotional intelligence is not about less-or-more action, but about action arising from a particular kind of thoughtfulness; thoughtfulness emanating from feeling’. EI may also help to counterbalance a system driven by processes, promoting a more ‘human face’ of the police service and officers. As Ashurst (2011) asserts, emotional work and emotional intelligence may need to be different for various fields of professional practice. Indeed, the findings reported here makes a case for the development of EI to be an integral part of the recruitment and training practices of future and current officers. By focusing attention on the issue of emotions and EI within the context of DA and policing in a more conscious and explicit way, we can begin to treat it as an area of professional competency and give police officers a language to think about and discuss key aspects of their work. Given the importance of the police response for children, EI may create new understandings and, importantly, inform training and capacity building designed to improve the ability of officers to relate to children in ways which are perceived as helpful. EI may offer a brave new frontier for future research in this field.

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